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Visible Harvey
The Rachel's will open for PJ Harvey at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Vic Theatre, as Harvey plays songs from her recently released album, "Is This Desire?" 312-618-8439.

Arts watch

Raw Patty
Rocker Patty Griffin is part of the Beezlebub Ball Friday at the Congress Theater. 312-836-5900.

Online: Cirque du Soleil
Find coverage of Cirque du Soleil's new Las Vegas show and other overnight reviews as they become available at metromix.com/go/reviews or by using keywords TRIBUNE REVIEWS on America Online. The reviews will appear in Thursday's Tribune.

Nothing sacred

Accompanied by some of her best friends, Lisa Carver is at once intimate, upbeat and naughty

By Cara Jepsen
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Performance review

■ For more Arts watch reviews, see Page 7.

Dover, N.H., resident Lisa Carver formed the music-and-performance group Suckdog in 1987, when she and pal Rachel Johnson gave up on waiting for punk shock-rocker G.G. Allin to arrive for a gig they had booked for him. The frisky pair took the stage, where they laughed and screamed and slapped people good-naturedly while a friend played keyboards.

They got a reaction, and the on-again, off-again group evolved to include a revolving cast of Carver's friends. In addition to recording CDs that included original songs, snippets of conversations and answering machine messages, they put on elaborate rock operas in which they occasionally smeared themselves with human waste to get a rise from their fans.

At the group's performance at Lounge Ax Sunday, Carver, who is also the mastermind behind the fanzine "Rollerderby," was joined by cartoonist and actress Dame Darcy. The blond look-alike pair wore velvet dresses and feather boas, and the stage was decorated with shiny cutouts of clouds and waves. The pair laughed and sang over tapes of songs such as the discordant "Anatomically Correct" and the sanguine "Brother's Rain," which are on the greatest-hits album "Onward Suckdog Soldiers." They were joined by long-time collaborator Cot the Shroom on guitar and a backup singer/dancer called David the Crazy Karaokier, who sang and sprang about the stage with boundless energy.

Their repertoire included brilliantly off-kilter interpretations of Bad Company's "Feel Like Makin' Love" and Queen's "Crazy Little Thing Called Love." There was also dancing, including a passable robot imitation by Cot the Shroom.

The group was occasionally joined by a performer in a pink fur bikini and bunny ears, who did a slow, sultry dance to the side of the stage. Several times, Carver ran into the crowd, grabbed people at random and forced them to lie down and writhe with her on the club's beer-soaked floor.

The performance had the same intimate, upbeat-but-naughty tone that permeates Carver's "Rollerderby" zine. Both Suckdog and the magazine have a merry, nothing-is-sacred quality that makes it difficult to look away, because you don't want to miss anything.

After 12 songs, the tape ended and there was silence. "You want an encore, right?" Carver asked. "Then four people have to get on their knees and beg."

They did, of course, and were rewarded with a childlike ditty about a "French toast man." Afterward, David grabbed the guitar, removed his clothes and played one of his own songs while Carver sold CDs and back issues of "Rollerderby" — an appropriate ending to the short-but-sweet set.

Lisa Carver and friends entertained with a short-but-sweet set Sunday at Lounge Ax.

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Pianist Pollini offers a masterful performance

By John von Rhein
Tribune Music Critic

Classical review

Listeners respond in different ways to Maurizio Pollini's playing. While acknowledging he is among the sovereign pianists of our time, some have complained of a certain clinical detachment in his playing, especially of the Romantic repertoire. Well, one man's detachment is another man's aristocratic poise. To these ears, Pollini's recital Sunday afternoon at Symphony Center was nothing if not a feast of poised, pianistically cultivated playing.

Indeed, if there were any lingering doubts about the pianist's Romantic affinities, his program of Schubert and Schumann works effectively silenced them. Would that it had silenced the coughing brigade as well.

I don't think there's a pianist alive whose technique is so complete or which disappears so utterly in the music he makes. Listening to Pollini's magisterial Schubert Sonata in B-flat (D.960), one was so swept up in the beauty of the long cantabile phrases that one paid less mind to the artistry that shaped and sustained every phrase. Pollini's performance became the music, and that was all that mattered.

Despite the program annotator's assertion that this late masterpiece isn't "autumnal or valedictory" in character, almost everything in his inspired reading conveyed that feeling. A great deal of this had to do with the subtlety with which Pollini colored melodic and harmonic ideas. But just as much, I think, owed to his allowing this expansive music time and space in which to resonate.

He began the Schumann half of his recital with the seldom-heard Allegro in B minor, Opus 8, playing it with dazzling power and sweep. It took a reading of such quality to reveal the musical worth of this "unknown" gem of *Sturm und Drang* Schumann.

Then it was on to Schumann's Fantasy in C, Opus 17. The pianist's 1973 DG recording has long been a classic, so it was fascinating to hear his latest reflections on one of the composer's most deeply personal works. His approach has lost nothing in poise and technical splendor, while movements like the slow, solemn finale now reveal an even greater mellowness of thought and feeling, as if Pollini were concentrating a lifetime's study of Schumann's music in his fingertips.

The Italian pianist is a master of transition, with the result that the opening movement — taken as passionately and energetically as the score demands — sounded all of a piece, not episodic. Pollini is among the very few who manage to pull off this elusive section with the proper control and virtuosity. The central march carried a forward-moving grandeur that was very impressive, and if the coda sacrificed a few notes to speed, Pollini could take solace in the fact that nearly every pianist runs aground here. Purely and simply, a great performance.

As if all this were not satisfaction enough, Pollini obliged the jubilant standees with encores — Chopin's "Harp" Etude in A-flat and Scherzo No. 1 in B minor, marvelously played.

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